

San Jose Mercury News (CA)-September 12, 1994

Section: Business Monday

Edition: Morning Final

Page: 1D

## THE BIRTH OF A BUSINESS AREA WOMAN'S HOMEMADE BABY CARRIER LEADS TO HER OWN ENTERPRISE

SHERRI ENG, Mercury News Staff Writer

IT would be difficult to confuse Nancy Scrivens with many other Silicon Valley entrepreneurs.

Scrivens operates her business -- selling a new type of baby carrier -- from deep in the heart of the Santa Cruz Mountains while tending to her three young children. She's had no formal business training, and her work experience consists of cooking at a restaurant and making jewelry.

Her homegrown trade began with the back and arm pain she suffered while carrying her first two children. Three years ago, after her third child, Angela, was born, Scrivens, now 37, developed The New Native Baby Carrier. Angela rested in a flexible pocket that curved around her bottom, holding her securely in place.

"I was able to do things and still have her close to me," Scrivens recalled. "I ended up carrying her more, all the way until she could crawl."

Angela, for what it's worth, still endorses the sling. Now an active toddler weighing 32 pounds, she still hops into the sling, often handing the carrier to her mother. Elsewhere, too, the product has attracted favorable reviews.

"I liked it a lot," said Lorrie Carlson, who bought a sling two years ago to carry her son. "I could adjust it so that he could sit up and could see the world go by, instead of falling between the folds."

The sling-like carrier is worn across the body like a sash, allowing the parent free use of hands. Unlike other bulkier baby carriers, the sling, which comes in five sizes, is a single piece of cloth. It distributes the child's weight along a 20-inch wide strip, so that a parent's arms and shoulders are not pinched. The sling can carry up to 35 pounds.

"Since the sling is one piece, you don't have to worry about it coming untied," said Barbara Morgan, who carries the product in her San Jose baby goods store. "We've never had anyone return it because they didn't like it."

Deborah Homan describes the sling as a lifesaver after she broke her leg two months before the birth of her son. She realized she would be in a cast until the baby was 2 1/2 months old. "I was looking for something that allowed me to be mobile and have him close to me, instead of just sitting with him," she recalls. "It was shaped well and held him in snug enough so that I could bend over without worrying about him falling out."

Scrivens got the idea for her sling from a friend who was making similar carriers and giving them away. Scrivens made some improvements to the device, switching to a heavier material and a deeper pocket. She formed the new enterprise -- her first -- out of her Bonny Doon home in May 1992 with small savings and two loans, for \$1,300, from friends. She later sold a 24-karat gold necklace to place an advertisement in *The Doula*, a parenting magazine in Santa Cruz. Six months ago, Jane McConnell, a retired nurse in Bonny Doon, gave Scrivens \$7,000 for her business.

"I thought this was a very worthwhile endeavor and Nancy worked very hard on it," said McConnell, who has helped other small businesses start up.

Like many start-ups, Scrivens' business began slowly. She initially sold only one or two carriers a month. Now, she typically sells 50 to 70 slings monthly, taking in \$900 to \$1,200. Her goal is to sell as many as 20,000 carriers a month within five years.

"I want to make a difference for a lot of people. That's why I've made that goal," Scrivens said. "I don't know all of the 'hows' to get there, but I have some ideas and I'm just inching along as fast as I can."

The New Native Baby Carrier sells in children's stores in California, Illinois, Texas, New York and Pennsylvania, as well as through Scrivens' mail-order business. Local retailers that carry the product include The Kidz Shoppe, The Kids Clothesline, Children's Heartland, Cotton Tales, Staff of Life and The Little People's Store. The slings retail for \$29.95 or \$34.95 (for the organically grown cotton model).

"It looks like a real nifty sling," said Morgan, owner of The Kidz Shoppe in San Jose. "You can lay babies down in it even when they're only a few weeks old. As the kid gets bigger, he can use it as a seat and sit in it."

Scrivens, who separated from her husband earlier this year, takes care of her three kids while managing her business. She sews most of the slings herself and occasionally hires other moms, who can do the work at home.

"It amazed me that she was a single mother and got herself together and started a business to make her situation better," McConnell said.

For Scrivens, her sling is more than a modest business. She contends carrying a child in a sling creates a bond between parent and child. She founded Friends of Bonding, a group of people who promote parent-child bonding. It also collects donations to subsidize carriers for low-income families.

"(Angela) didn't cry because I was more in touch with her," Scrivens said. "As a result, she feels that she can ask for what she wants, and she's not afraid of other adults."

Copyright (c) 1994 San Jose Mercury News